Origin, meanings and abuses of the ethnonym Melchites

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28 April 2024 – 12 March 2025

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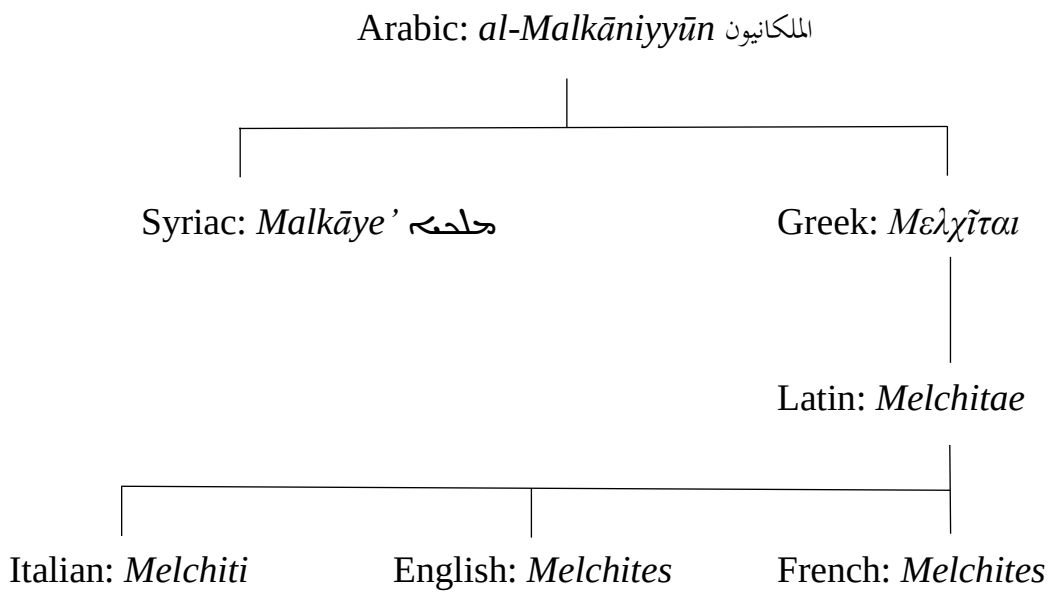
1. Origin of the ethnonym *Melchites*:

1.1. Derivation:



1.2. Arabic *al-Malkāniyyūn* الملكانيون and *al-Malkiyyūn* الملكيون:

The name *al-Malkāniyyūn* الملكانيون was created by Ismā‘īl al-Suddī اسماعيل السدى in his *Book of the Interpretation of the Coran* written before 746. In his interpretation of Maryam 37, he wrote the following:[1]

قَوْلُهُ {فَاخْتَلَفَ الأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَيْنِهِمْ} [مريم ٣٧] . فى الدِّينِ . يَعْنِى النَّصَارَى . فَتُجَادِلُوا فِى عِيسَى . فَقَالَتِ النُّسْطُورِيَّةُ : عِيسَى ابْنُ اللَّهِ . تَعَالَى رَبُّنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ . وَ قَالَتِ الْيَعْقُوبِيَّةُ : {إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ} [المائدة ١٧] . جَلَّ رَبُّنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ . وَ قَالَ الملكَانِيُّونَ : {إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلاثَةٍ} [المائدة ٧٣] قَالُوا : اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَ عِيسَى إِلَهٌ وَ مَرْيَمُ إِلَهٌ .

His saying {The parties disagreed among themselves} [Maryam 37]. (They disagreed) about the Law. He means the Christians. They debated about Jesus. The Nestorians said: “Jesus is the son of God.” The Jacobites said: {God is Christ son of Mary} [Al-Ma’idah 17]. The Melchites said: {God is the third of three} [Al-Ma’idah 73]. They said: “God is a god, Jesus is a god, and Mary is a god.”

Al-Suddī took his interpretation from the version of Ma‘mar Ibn Rāšid معمر بن راشد of the *Interpretation of the Coran* of Qatādah قتادة. In this version, four Christian sects are mentioned:[2]

[1] Yaħyā ibn Salām, *Tafsīru*, v. 1, pp. 223-224.
[2] ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīru*, v. 2, p. 359. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīru*, v. 15, pp. 537-538. Ibn Abī Ħātim, *Tafsīru*, v. 7, pp. 2408-2409.

1) the Muslims (*al-Muslimūn* المسلمون), who say that Jesus is the slave and messenger of God,

2) the Nestorians (*al-Nasṭūriyyatu* النسطورية), who say that Jesus is the son of God,

3) the Jacobites (*al-Ya'qūbiyyatu* اليعقوبية), who say that God is Jesus,

4) the Israelites who are the kings of the Christians (*al-Isrā'īliyyatu wa hum mulūku 'l-Naṣārā* الاسرائيلية و هم ملوك النصارى), who say that there are 3 gods: God, Jesus and Mary.

Al-Suddī derived *malkāniyyūn* ملكانيون "royals" from *mulūku 'l-naṣārā* ملوك النصارى "kings of the Christians" used in the version of Ma'mar Ibn Rāšid. In Arabic, ملك is pronounced *malkun* and *malikun*,[3] and ملكانيون can be pronounced *malkāniyyūn* and *malikāniyyūn*. The suffix انيون *āniyyūn* is used in Arabic to form relative names as الروحانيون *al-rūḥāniyyūn* "the spirituals" derived from الروح *al-rūḥu* "the spirit". Therefore, *malkāniyyūn* ملكانيون is not derived from the Syriac *malkā* ܡܠܟܐ "king".

The form *al-Malkiyyūn* الملكيون is a later form of *al-Malkāniyyūn* used during the 9th century. الملكيون can be pronounced *al-Malikiyyūn* also.

[3] Ibn Manżūr, *Lisānu 'l-'Arabi,* ملك.

1.3. Syriac *Malkāye'* ܡܠܟܝܐ:

Timothy catholicus of the Nestorians (780–823) may be the first writer[4] to use the name *Malkāye'* ܡܠܟܝܐ in Syriac, as an equivalent to *Chalcedonians*, in his debate[5] with caliph Al-Mahdi (775–785) and in his letters[6]. This debate was originally done in Arabic and Timothy recorded it in Syriac. This is a proof that the Syriac *Malkāye'* is the translation of the Arabic *al-Malkāniyyūn*.[7]

1.4. Greek *Μελχῖται*:

Demetrius metropolitan of Cyzicus may be the first writer[8] to use the name *Μελχῖται* in his treatise on the Jacobites and the Chatzitzarians[9] which he dedicated to emperor Constantine between 1025 and 1028. He says the following:[10]

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[4] There are no Syriac writings before him using this name.
[5] Timothy, *The apology*, pp. 223-224.
[6] Timothy, *Epistulae*, vol. 74, pp. 17, 22, 25, 144. Pognon, *Une version*, pp. XIX, XXV.
[7] Timothy also uses other Arabic words like الحواريون *al-ħawāriyyūn* "the apostles" (*The apology*, p. 178) and الفرقان *al-furqānu* (*Ibid*., p. 185). He also translates verses of the Coran.
[8] There are no Greek writings before him using this name.
[9] Demetrius, *Ἔκθεσις*, Vat. Gr. 712 pp. 127b-128a, Sin. Gr. 1795 pp. 67a-67b. *Ibid.*, *De Rebus*, p. 881.
[10] The text is from Vat. Gr. 712 pp. 127b-128a and Sin. Gr. 1795 pp. 67a-67b. These are more correct than the text published in *Patrologia Graeca*, and contain the introduction mentioning emperor Constantine, which is lacking in the text of *PO*. Also, Vat. Gr. 712, from the 12th century, is one of the oldest manuscripts.

τοῦ τοίνυν δηλωθέντος Ἰακώβου τὸ τοῦ Εὐτυχοῦς δόγμα πεπαῤῥησιασμένως κηρύττοντος, σχίσμα γέγονεν ἐν τοῖς Σύροις. καὶ οἱ μὲν Ὀρθόδοξοι οἱ τῇ συνόδῳ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ Μαρκιανῷ ἀκολουθήσαντες, ἐκλήθησαν Μελχῖται· ὡς φρονοῦντες τὰ τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου βασιλέως. ἐπεὶ μελχὶ λέγεται καθ' Ἑβραίους καὶ Σύρους ὁ βασιλεὺς.

οἱ δὲ Εὐτυχιανισταὶ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις Μονοθελῆται, οἱ τῷ μοναχῷ Ἰακώβῳ τῷ εὐτελεῖ καὶ ἀνωνύμῳ Σύρῳ πεισθέντες, ὠνομάσθησαν Ἰακωβῖται. καὶ ἕκτοτε μέχρι τοῦ νῦν, οὕτως ἀπ' ἐκείνου καλοῦνται.

The indicated Jacob having preached the doctrine of Eutyches outspokenly, a schism happened among the Syrians. The orthodox, who followed the synod and emperor Marcianus, were called Melchites, as if holding the opinions of the orthodox emperor. Because the king is called *melchi* according to the Hebrews and the Syrians.

The Eutychianists and, in addition to them, the Monothelites, who were persuaded by monk Jacob the worthless and nameless Syrian, were called Jacobites. Since that time and until now, they are called as such after him.

The name *Μελχῖται* was translated from Arabic not Syriac, as proven by the following:

1) The Jacobite Syrians usually used the name *Chalcedonians* rather than *Melchites* in Syriac, as evident in their Syriac writings during the 9th and 10th centuries.

2) The name *Melchites* was commonly used in Arabic. Romans speaking Arabic were found in Antioch and in Constantinople. Jacobite Syrians speaking Arabic were also found in Antioch and other Roman lands.

3) The use of this name by the Jacobite Syrians and its common use in Syria made Demetrius misunderstand its etymology.

4) The origin of the name *Μελχῖται* is given as the Syriac and Hebrew *μελχί* "king". The word *μελχί* and its definition were taken from Hebrews 7:1-2 and from lexica of Biblical Hebrew names:

> 1, In Hebrews 7:1-2, the name *Melchisedec Μελχισεδέκ* is defined as βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης "the king of righteousness".
>
> 2, One lexicon has:[11]
>
> > Μελχισεδέκ βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης.
> >
> > Melchisedec: king of righteousness.
>
> 3, Another lexicon has:[12]
>
> > Μελχὶ βασιλεύς. Μελχισεδὲκ βασιλεὺς εἰρηνικός.
> >
> > Melchi: king. Melchisedec: peaceful king.

The correct form of "king" is *malkā* ܡܠܟܐ in Syriac and *melek* מֶלֶךְ in Hebrew. The name *Μελχῖται* was composed from this same word *μελχί* not from Syriac. This is a firm proof that the composer of the name *Μελχῖται* ignored Syriac and Hebrew and was only using these Biblical lexica.

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[11] *Λέξεις*, p. 4b. This manuscript dates to the 11th century and is contemporary to Demetrius.
[12] Ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς, pp. 79a-79b = De Lagarde, *Onomastica*, vol. 1, p. 203. However, this manuscript dates to the 14th century and is later than the time of Demetrius.

Nicephore Callistus Xanthopulus copied this text of Demetrius on the Jacobites and the Melchites into his *Ecclesiastical History* 18.52.

1.5. Latin *Melchitae*:

The Latin translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Xanthopulus was published in Basel in 1553. In it, *Μελχῖται* was translated as *Melchitae*.

The Latin translation of the treatise of Demetrius on the Jacobites and the Chatzitzarians was published in *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum*[13] in Lyon in 1677.

1.6. Italian *Melchiti* and English and French *Melchites*:

From the Latin translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Xanthopulus, *Melchitae* was translated into Italian as *Melchiti* and into French and English as *Melchites*.

In Italian, one of the earliest uses of *Melchiti* is from 1595.[14]

[13] Volume 12, pp. 813-814.
[14] Botero, *Le relationi universali*, pp. 199-200 (*Fig*. 7-8).

In French, one of the earliest uses of *Melchites* is from 1613.[15]

In English, one of the earliest uses of *Melchites* is from 1622.[16]

[15] D'Avity, *Les estats*, pp. 1263-1264 (*Fig.* 10-11).
[16] Brerewood, *Enquiries*, pp. 129-133 (*Fig.* 15-19).

2. Meanings of the ethnonym *Melchites*:

2.1. Three main meanings:

The ethnonym Melchites has three main meanings:

1) A fictitious Christian sect.

2) The Chalcedonians.

3) The Romans.

2.2. Qatadah, Isma'il al-Suddi, al-Kalbi, Muqatil, and Ibn Ishaq:

2.3. Catholicus Timothy:

2.4. Theodore metropolitan of Harran:

2.5. Habib Abu Ra’itah:

2. Mari son of Solomon:

2. Barhebraeus:

2. Abu ’l-Makarim:

2. Ibn Taymiyyah:

2. Edict of sultan in favor of the Franciscans:

2. Al Nuwayri:

2. Ibn Khaldun:

2. Edict of sultan Qansu in the Church of Resurrection:

2. Daneau:

2. Botero:

2. Amira:

2. D'Avity:

2. Sionita:

2. Du Perron:

2. Roger:

2. Hottinger:

3. Abuses of the ethnonym *Melchites*:

3.1. Brerewood:

3.2. Ecchellensis:

Ecchellensis, in Simon, *Fides Ecclesiae Orientalis*, pp. 280-282.

3.3. Naironus:

3.4. Assemani:

3.5. Charon: